

Under The Christmas Moon

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This story was first published on December 7th, 2023, and was last updated on December 7th, 2023.

FicLab ID: Eh3RGCRP/lwgbzaeu/50000E541

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1. Under The Christmas Moon

Summary

title Under The Christmas Moon
author Josh1013
source <https://www.fanfiction.net/s/14305413/>
published December 7th, 2023
updated December 7th, 2023
words 3,503
chapters 1
status Complete
rating Fiction T
tags Complete, Fanfiction, Final Fantasy IX, Games, Garnet A., Zidane T.

Description:

Garnet is determined to give Zidane a heartfelt Christmas present, but ends up meeting a lot of her friends along the way.

1. Under The Christmas Moon

A/n: To all of my other ff9 writers, i challenge you to submit a Christmas fic as well! If you enjoy this, leave a review with your thoughts!

...

This fic is dedicated to Anti-Broadcast.

The first flurries of snow danced gracefully from the sky, slowly covering the cobblestone streets of Alexandria in a glistening blanket. Garnet made her way towards the town square, taking in the festive decorations and twinkling lights that adorned every building and tree. Today was Christmas, and she couldn't help but feel a sense of warmth and joy spread through her as she walked.

As her thoughts drifted to Zidane, she felt a small smile tug at the corners of her mouth. Eiko, who had been bounding ahead of her, suddenly came to a stop and turned to face Garnet with a mischievous twinkle in her eye. "Did you get Zidane a present this year?" She asked eagerly.

Garnet paused for a moment to adjust her scarf before turning to face the younger girl. It had been

five years since they had defeated Necron and brought about a lasting peace to their world. Eiko, once a wild and rambunctious summoner, had now settled into castle life with ease after being adopted by Cid and Hilda. Despite initial concerns, she had taken to her lessons and responsibilities as princess of Lindblum remarkably well. Garnet couldn't help but wonder if Eiko's determination to outdo her own accomplishments played a part in her success.

Shaking these thoughts from her mind, Garnet met Eiko's gaze with a playful one of her own. "Of course, I got him a gift. How could I ever forget? After all, he gives me a great one every year."

Eiko's smug expression only seemed to grow as she laced her fingers behind her back. "Good," she replied with satisfaction. "You better not keep him waiting too long." Garnet chuckled, grateful for Eiko's friendship and the joy she brought into their lives.

"I know." She smiled and gazed around again at the intricate and twinkling decorations that showed how peaceful and inviting Alexandria had become. The warm glow of lanterns illuminated the streets, giving the city a magical atmosphere. "I don't think he'll mind though if I'm only a little late, and don't

you think you've put off getting Vivi something long enough? After all, he did get you that jacket you're wearing."

"I— I'm getting to it!" Eiko defended, suddenly flustered. She quickly scanned the nearby merchant stalls, not wanting to meet Garnet's knowing gaze. "And besides, it's not like he deserves a present anyway! He's always so rude to me!" She huffed, feigning interest in some trinkets on display.

But despite her attempts to escape the subject, she could feel Garnet's questioning gaze lingering on her. She shifted uncomfortably under the Queen's perceptive stare.

"Do you really expect me to believe that? I don't think Vivi is capable of being rude. If anything, weren't you the one scolding him for being slow earlier? With everyone else, you're all politeness and grace but with him, you revert to your old ways like when we were traveling together." Garnet finally spoke, a small smirk tugging at her lips.

Eiko sighed dramatically and straightened up, realizing she couldn't hide any longer. "Alright, fine! I admit it, maybe I have been a little bit harsh with him. But how am I supposed to just casually

give him a present after avoiding him for a whole week?”

Garnet’s laughter bubbled up from within her as she listened to Eiko begin to fret over what gift to get for their dear friend Vivi. The streets were bustling with townsfolk, but they seemed to be the only ones out searching for a present on this chilly morning. As they strolled past various stalls and shops, Garnet couldn’t help but admire the festive atmosphere that filled the air with the scent of roasted chestnuts and mulled wine.

Eiko’s arms were crossed tightly over her chest, her brow furrowed in deep concentration as she considered possible gifts for Vivi. Garnet could see the determination and love in her friend’s eyes as she searched for the perfect present. “Maybe you should get him a new staff?” Garnet suggested, nodding towards a cart selling beautifully crafted accessories and weapons. They approached the cart, admiring the intricately carved designs on each item. Among them was a stunning staff made from dry aged wood, adorned with delicate patterns of birds and flowers that seemed to come alive under the soft glow of lantern light.

“He already has a staff that he takes with him everywhere,” Eiko huffed in frustration, not even giving it a second glance.

“He’s been visiting Lindblum more often than Alexandria recently,” Garnet pointed out, trying to think of something that might catch Vivi’s interest.

“Well, he has been spending a lot of time in the castle library,” Eiko pondered.

“Then why don’t we try to find him a book he would enjoy?” Garnet suggested with a mischievous grin, leading them towards the newly built bookstore. Thanks to her recent changes to the taxation system, businesses like this one were flourishing and bringing life back into the city. Garnet couldn’t help but feel proud of her accomplishments as they made their way through the stalls and finally reached the entrance.

As the heavy wooden door swung open, a small bell chimed and echoed throughout the quaint store. The air was filled with the rich scent of leather-bound books and fresh pine from the small Christmas tree in the corner. The owner, a thin old man with kind eyes and a nervous demeanor, greeted them with a bow.

“Y-Your Majesty! W-What brings you to my humble store this fine morning?” he stuttered, clearly surprised by their presence.

“There’s no need to be so formal,” Garnet said with a warm smile. “You can call me Garnet. And what is your name?”

“My name is Reginald, your majesty... I mean Garnet,” he corrected himself with another bow. “How may I assist you on this lovely Christmas morning?”

“We are looking for books,” Eiko interjected impatiently. “Do you have any on spells or magic?”

Reginald’s face lit up at the mention of magic. “Why, yes! We have a whole section dedicated to books on spells and magic. May I suggest this one?” He picked up a thick, leather-bound tome with gold lettering on the front cover. “It’s a spell book that contains rare and powerful spells. It’s quite popular among mages and scholars.”

Eiko’s eyes widened with excitement as she took the book from Reginald. “This is perfect! Vivi will love this. Thank you, Reginald.”

“It was my pleasure, Princess Eiko,” Reginald replied with a grateful bow.

Garnet smiled at the exchange as she scanned the nearby shelves and her eyes landed on a book that piqued her curiosity. The story was about a fairytale king who lost his beloved queen and was now responsible for raising his three daughters. As if that wasn't challenging enough, they were also soon tasked with saving the world. As a busy queen, Garnet rarely had time for leisurely activities such as reading, but this particular book captured her attention and she decided to treat herself to it.

As they finalized their purchases, Garnet and Eiko exchanged a smile tinged with a hint of sadness even though they both anticipated the joy that Vivi would experience upon opening his Christmas present. With a warm embrace and a whispered reminder from Eiko to not forget Zidane's gift and to tell him merry Christmas from her, Garnet watched her friend head off towards the castle, its grand gates standing as sentinels to the holiday festivities.

"Have a wonderful Christmas, my dear friends," Garnet thought wistfully, her gaze lingering on the majestic castle. She stood there in the bustling market square for a few moments lost in her thoughts until a small child bumped into her.

Garnet quickly apologized before turning and strolling through the festive streets until she found herself at Ruby's bar, the lively sounds of merry-making spilled onto the cobblestone pathway, creating a harmonious melody that seemed to resonate with the spirit of the season. The familiar creak of the bar's door announced her arrival.

Inside, the atmosphere was electric. Ruby's bar, adorned with decorations like those outside, emanated a welcoming aura. Cinna, Marcus, Blank, and Ruby were huddled around a table, their faces illuminated by the soft glow of candlelight. The air buzzed with laughter, and the clinking of glasses underscored the camaraderie that filled the room. Garnet couldn't help but smile as she joined the lively group.

"How have you been Garnet? We haven't seen you in months!" Ruby smiled from her seat beside Blank.

"I couldn't be better." Garnet grinned apologetically. "I'm sorry I haven't been stopping by it's just hard to sometimes."

"Don't worry, we understand." Blank reassured. "It can't be easy being a queen."

“It definitely has its challenges.” She admitted sheepishly, looking towards the bar. The place was packed, but aside from the Tantalus gang, she didn’t see anyone else she recognized.

“Do you have any plans for Christmas?” Blank asked, wrapping his arm subconsciously around Ruby.

“Well, I helped Eiko find a present for Vivi, so I guess now I’m going to go see Beatrix and Steiner; I haven’t seen them much since their daughter Astrid was born.”

“It really is hard to believe ol’ Rust Bucket retired and is just a normal dad, isn’t it?” Marcus commented, motioning to the bartender for a drink.

“Yea, it’s almost hard to believe he had it in him. But somehow, I knew he was a softie.” Cinna agreed with a grin.

“I’m sure he’s a great father.” Garnet smiled gently, looking down at the small neatly wrapped gift she was still holding. “Anyway, after I spend a little time with them, I just plan on spending the rest of the day with Zidane.”

“It wouldn’t be Christmas if you didn’t, hun.” Ruby pepped up, smiling warmly. “What did you get

him this year?”

“I know it’s something personal, but I really hope understands.” Garnet grinned slightly. “It’s really not much, but I wanted to give him something that meant a lot to me.”

“I’m sure he’ll love it, dear.” Ruby assured, “I hope he knows he’s lucky to have you.”

“I think I’m the lucky one...” she trailed off turning towards the door to leave. “I better get going, I still want to visit them, and I can’t keep Zidane waiting too long.”

“Hey,” Blank began, standing up and stepping towards her. “I don’t want to ruin your plans but why don’t you stop back by after you get back from Rusty’s? We can all have a few drinks together and then I’ll send one of Ruby’s vintage bottles like ‘The Last Cherry Blossom’ with you when you go, so y’all can celebrate together.”

Garnet hesitated with her hand on the door.

“C’mon, I know him better than anyone. You really think he’s gonna be pissed if you have a couple drinks with us first?” Blank persuaded.

After a moment she let out a relenting sigh. “I promised Zidane I wouldn’t keep him waiting too long... but I don’t guess he will get mad if I just have a drink or two, so I promise I’ll come back as soon as I can.” With that she turned and left the bar.

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“Wow, she’s growing up so fast!” A wide-eyed Garnet exclaimed as Astrid toddled towards her clumsily with arms outstretched and smiling broadly. The young brunette girl had just celebrated her second birthday a few months ago, and from what Garnet could tell, she would probably look mostly like her mother.

“Are you sure you should have taken this much time out of your schedule just to visit us?” Beatrix asked, a hint of guilt in her voice.

“Of course! You all will always be like family to me.” Garnet shook her head. “That will never change no matter what.”

“But.... We basically shirked our duties. We put our needs as a family ahead of our loyalty to you. I should be back in that castle doing my duties as your general!” Beatrix objected.

“I have never once questioned where your loyalties lie.” Garnet replied sternly. The older woman began to protest again, but instead turned towards the kitchen where Steiner was busy cooking something that made Garnet realize just how hungry she really was. They had been catching up for quite a while now and it was already growing late into mid-day. ‘You’re both here taking care of your family because I insisted on it. Don’t ever forget that.’ The moment seemed to hang in the air as Beatrix turned back and studied her carefully. “Look, I’m fine! I promise! If anyone needs you night and day, it’s this little one right here. She’s so precious and she needs both of her parents. There are dozens of guards in the castle, but for her, there’s no replacement for either of you. When she’s older and if you all want to stay in the castle, then I’ll gladly welcome you back.”

“Alright...” Beatrix relented. “I know you can’t stay much longer, but are you sure you won’t at least let us share a meal with you?”

“I would..” Garnet smiled apologetically and hugged Astrid. “but I’m really not hungry and I do have to hurry now; it made me so happy seeing all of you again. So far, this has been an amazing Christmas and I hope it only gets better.”

“Then feel free to come back and see us anytime. Astrid loves having someone to play with.” Beatrix offered as she opened the door for her.

“I will.” Garnet replied embracing the taller woman for a short moment. “and stop by the castle sometime. You may not be my General, but you will always be a welcomed guest.” With that, Garnet stepped out into the cold winter air. She tightened her scarf out of habit again as she made her way along the cobbled walkway. After a short while she came to a large puddle that covered most of the path. Instead of quickly jumping over it as she had done previously, she stopped and took a moment to look at her reflection. In the last five years, she had grown. Maybe not a lot physically except for her hair being almost as long as it had been back then and she was convinced she had gotten at least a little taller. But no, the main difference was that she had grown mentally. She was stronger now than she had ever been. Maybe that too was partly because of him.

Splashing through the water and not caring that much of it soaked through her boots, she resumed her journey back to Ruby’s bar with purpose. It was getting late and there was little doubt that Zidane

was expecting her already so she would just had to drink those couple of drinks quickly.

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“We almost didn’t think you’d be back” Blank called with a grin.

“I gave you my word.” Garnet defended. “Like Zidane, if I can I’ll always keep my word. Besides, all of you are like family to me and I really do need to come visit more often.”

“Yea...” Blank sighed, swirling the whiskey left in the bottom of his glass. “So, how about that drink?”

“I’m gettin them!” Ruby called out from the back room. “Just hold your chocobos and I’ll be right there!”

Blank pushed out the chair across from him with his leg and motioned for her to sit down as Cinna and Marcus joined them again.

“How was ol’ Rusty?” asked Markus, looking appreciatively at the large mug Ruby placed in front of him.

“I didn’t get to talk to him much, but Astrid is really growing up.” Garnet replied fondly, accepting

her own drink and immediately taking a sip of the frothy liquid. “Thanks Ruby.” She offered.

“No problem, Hun. There’s plenty more where that came from, but are you sure you wouldn’t prefer some nice wine? You always end up getting his favorite.” Ruby replied, setting down two full pitchers and finally taking a seat with the others.

“I guess it’s just growing on me.” Garnet evaded, not looking up from her drink.

“I don’t want to seek uncaring or anything, but can I ask you somethin?” Ruby began, the others growing silent and suddenly becoming much more interested in their own drinks. She hesitated for a moment, then shook her head. “On second thought, let’s all just have a good time!”

Garnet knew what her friend had wanted to ask, but as she quickly downed her ale, she remembered this was Christmas and she couldn’t let anything ruin it. She had intended only to have a couple of drinks, but as Cinna began to recount some of the tales of the shenanigans that Tantalus had gotten into when Zidane was still a member, she found herself captivated and laughing with them. Before she knew it two drinks became three, then five. She wasn’t sure how much time and how many drinks had

passed when she clumsily made her way out of the bar and towards where she knew Zidane waited for her clutching a bottle of wine and the small present. She only knew that it was late, far later than she had intended and he would be disappointed in her and growing beyond impatient.

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The snow continued to fall gently under the crescent moon as Garnet rested her back against the smooth stone. Her head was tilted back as she gazed up at the night sky. "I... I'm sorry I was late Zidane; I hope you're not too mad at me." She began, relishing the moment and not caring that the cold had seeped through her layers of clothing and chilled her to the bone. She barely noticed the snow building up on her shoulders as the tears streamed down her face. 'I never wanted you to see my like this...' "She sobbed." I wanted you to see how happy I was trying to be... but I guess... I just miss you.' Beside her the bottle of vintage wine lay open and gently pouring out into the frozen ground. Garnet clutched the present tightly against her chest and clamped her eyes closed, not wanting him to see her cry. "Why... Why weren't you here to spend Christmas with me?"

The air around her was cold and silent save for the gentle breeze that sent tufts of snow spiraling across the ground. With a sadness that seemed too much to bear, she shifted to her knees and turned around toward the smooth stone. Carved on its surface was the name of the hero that had helped save Gaia and everyone in it, in her eyes Zidane was the true hero of the prevailing peace, the thread that had held their ragtag group together. Not only that, he was the thief that had succeeded in stealing her heart. “Why didn’t you keep your promise and come home to me with that goofy grin you always wore? Why did you have to—” She shook her head and no longer tried to fight the tears that flowed freely.

“No, that’s not why I’m here...” Messily wiping the tears from her face, she gently unwrapped the small box that she had cherished for what seemed like ages now. ‘I know I shouldn’t have... but I went through your things that you left back on the ship.’ She opened the box fully and set it carefully on top of his tombstone. A delicate and beautiful sapphire ring rested on velvet within. “I just... I wanted you to know that it fit me perfectly and that I would have of course said yes...” Her voice broke as she covered her face with her hands and sobbed. “I would have given up everything for you if you had

only asked me to... I'm so sorry you never got the chance." As if in response to her sadness, the snow falling around her slowly changed to a bitterly cold rain. "More than anything.... I'm sorry I never got to tell you that I loved you... and Merry Christmas Zidane.."

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